



# YOUR Health

Los Angeles County Department of Health Services • Public Health

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## A NEW DISEASE CALLED SARS

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is investigating a new disease called severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) recently reported among people in Asia, North America and Europe.

### Symptoms of SARS

In general, SARS begins with a fever greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (or 38.0 degrees Celsius). Other symptoms may include headache, an overall feeling of discomfort, and body aches. Some people also experience mild respiratory symptoms. After 2 to 7 days, SARS patients may develop a dry cough and have trouble breathing. For a diagnosis of SARS to be made, you must have recently traveled to the Republic of China (i.e., mainland China and Hong Kong); Hanoi, Vietnam; Singapore, or Toronto, Canada in the last 10 days or you must

have had contact with someone suspected of SARS and who has symptoms.

*The definition may change after this newsletter is published. For the most current information about SARS both locally and nationwide, please visit our website at [www.lapublichealth.org](http://www.lapublichealth.org).*

### How is SARS spread?

Public health experts think that SARS is spread by close contact between people.

SARS is most likely spread when someone sick with the disease coughs droplets into the air and someone else breathes them in. It is possible that SARS can spread more broadly through the air or from touching objects that have become contaminated. Public health scientists are still investigating the possible cause of SARS.

**Cases of SARS continue to be reported mainly among people who have had direct contact with an infected person, such as those sharing a household with a SARS patient and health care workers who did not use infection control procedures while taking care of a SARS patient.**

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## Pick Your Poison: Pests vs. Pesticides



### Key Word:

**A pesticide is a chemical used to kill pests, especially insects.**

When it comes to getting rid of unwanted pests in your home, it's a case of "pick your poison." While some people fear common pests like ants, cockroaches and rodents, others worry more about the chemical pesticides used to kill or keep away these creatures. Although little is known about the dangers associated with the common household use of pesticides, the health department recommends that you avoid using pesticides unless they are absolutely necessary.

### Prevent pests from getting into your home in the first place:

- ❖ Install screens on all the doors and windows and seal any openings in the floors or walls to keep pests (like bees, flies and rodents) from entering your home.
- ❖ Do not leave food and water where pests may get to them. For example, store food in tightly sealed glass or plastic containers to keep away ants.

### If pests do become a problem in your home, use other ways to get rid of them:

- ❖ Set mousetraps, use a 'swatter' for flies, bees and wasps, or handpick the weeds in your garden.
- ❖ In some cases, insects can even be used to control pests. Releasing ladybugs in the garden, for example, can help keep aphids under control.

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# Pesticide: Continued from page 1

## ***If other methods fail, use pesticides safely:***

- ❖ If you choose to use a pesticide, read the label carefully. If the label says “danger-poison,” the product contains chemicals that can be highly poisonous. If the label says “danger,” the product is poisonous or corrosive. “Warning” means that the product is moderately hazardous or harmful. And “caution” indicates that the product is the least hazardous.
- ❖ Follow the precautions recommended on the product label. For example, some labels may recommend that you wear protective clothing, such as nonabsorbent gloves, rubber shoes or goggles.



## ***Pesticides found in fruits and vegetables***

- ❖ Be aware that small amounts of pesticide (residue) may remain on certain foods, particularly fruits and vegetables. Rinse fruits and vegetables thoroughly under running water before eating or cooking them or consider peeling fruits and vegetables whenever possible. Or try “organically grown” fruits and vegetables, which have less pesticide residue.

## ***For more information about pesticides, please contact:***

- ❖ **National Pesticide Information Center**  
Phone: 1-800-858-7378  
Web site: <http://npic.orst.edu/gen.htm>  
E-mail: [npic@ace.orst.edu](mailto:npic@ace.orst.edu)
- ❖ **County of Los Angeles Agricultural Commissioner, Weights and Measurements**  
Phone: (626) 575-5471
- ❖ **Los Angeles County's Vector Management Program**  
Phone: (626) 430-5461

# Hepatitis B Vaccinations: ***Vaccinate Before They Graduate!***



Many teens between the ages of 15-18 years old missed out on hepatitis B immunizations because it was not required when they were infants or when they entered 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The Los Angeles County Immunization Program estimates that less than half of teens ages 15-18 years old have completed the entire hepatitis B immunization series. As a result, many teens may be at increased risk for hepatitis B, a life-threatening and contagious disease that can easily be prevented by a vaccine.

Hepatitis B is a virus that can affect a person for a lifetime, causing long-term liver damage, such as liver failure, cancer and death. The troubling part of the disease is that many people who get infected do not know it because they do not look or feel sick. The hepatitis B virus can be found in blood and other bodily fluids and can easily be spread through sharing toothbrushes or razors; from unclean needles used in tattooing or body piercing; or through sexual contact. To be fully protected against hepatitis B, a teenager needs 2 or 3 shots over a 4 to 6 month period. The vaccine is a low-cost, safe and effective way to prevent hepatitis B infection.

***The Immunization Program strongly recommends that all parents do the following before their teen graduates from high school:***

- ❖ Review their teen's immunization record (yellow card);
- ❖ Verify the immunization record (yellow card) with a doctor or school nurse;
- ❖ Make sure their teen completes the hepatitis B immunizations. In fact, some colleges require students to have these immunizations before starting college.

***Ensure your teens good health with hepatitis B vaccinations before they graduate!***

***Children under 19 years old can receive free or low-cost immunizations at any of the County Public Health clinics. Call 1-800-427-8700 or visit [www.lapublichealth.org/ip](http://www.lapublichealth.org/ip) for a clinic in your neighborhood.***



# Syphilis: What You Don't Know Can Hurt You

A disease that was almost eradicated and once considered a very serious infection is now beginning to reappear. Over the past two years, the rates of syphilis in the Los Angeles County have been increasing rapidly, with the highest rates found among men who have sex with men (MSM).

## What is Syphilis?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) that is caused by the bacteria *Treponema pallidum*. It can be transmitted from mother to child during childbirth and through unprotected anal, vaginal and oral sex via "skin to skin" contact with an infected person. Syphilis is not transmitted through blood or body fluids. Skin-to-skin contact is the actual rubbing during sex or foreplay, which can lead to tiny tears in the skin. These tears can allow the bacteria to enter the body.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

Syphilis is a disease of stages. Many people do not know they have syphilis or notice its symptoms. The first stage begins about 3-12 weeks after having sexual contact with an infected person. It begins with a painless, red-dish-brown sore called a "chancre" on the mouth, genitals, breasts or fingers. If the chancre is inside the anus or the vagina it will rarely be noticed since it causes no pain. The chancre lasts about 1-5 weeks and then disappears on its own.

***Syphilis is a preventable and curable infection; however, if left untreated, it can lead to severe health problems such as heart damage, paralysis or even death.***

Although the chancre has disappeared, syphilis is still present. About one week to six months after the chancre disappears, new symptoms may develop.

The second stage of syphilis includes a rash on the body, the palms of the hands or soles of the feet. Other symptoms include moist warts in the mouth, anus, or genitals. Patches of baldness on the head, flu-like feelings, fatigue, headache, or a sore throat are other symptoms of secondary syphilis. Secondary syphilis may come and go for about a year. During this stage, a person with syphilis can still infect another person, and a pregnant woman can transmit the bacteria to her child.

After one year of infection, a person enters the "early latent" stage. In this stage, a person can no longer infect another person and cannot transmit the virus to an unborn child. However, until the disease is cured, the person still has syphilis. If syphilis goes untreated for many years it may enter the "tertiary" stage and begin to damage one's heart, brain, bones, and other organs. During this stage, permanent and deadly harm can be done to your body.

## Prevention, Testing and Treatment

Using a condom can lower the risk of contracting syphilis; however, there is still risk of infection as the condom may not cover an infected area such as the scrotum or the base of a penis. Use water-based lubricants to reduce the friction or rubbing during sex that may break a condom or cause tiny tears in the genitals or anal area.

To get tested for syphilis, you can go to a clinic or a doctor. Syphilis is diagnosed through a blood test.

If diagnosed with syphilis, you will be treated with penicillin. Though the medication kills the bacteria, any damage caused before treatment remains and must be treated or cared for separately. For syphilis treatment to be effective, it is recommended that you do not have sex until you and your partner are cured.



**For more information: Please call the Los Angeles County STD Hotline at 1-800-758-0880 (English and Spanish) or visit the Los Angeles County STD Program web site at <http://lapublichealth.org/std/>**

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### Who is at risk for SARS?

Cases of SARS continue to be reported mainly among people who have had direct contact with an infected person, such as those sharing a household with a SARS patient and health care workers who did not use infection control procedures while taking care of a SARS patient. CDC advises that people planning travel to affected countries consider postponing their trip until further notice.

### For individuals who may think they have SARS

People with symptoms of SARS (fever of more than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or 38.0 degrees Celsius, coughing, and/or difficulty breathing) should consult their physician. Tell your physician if you have recently traveled to places where SARS has been reported or if you had contact with someone who has these symptoms.

### SARS INFORMATION HOTLINE AVAILABLE IN 7 LANGUAGES

*The Los Angeles County Department of Health Services has a toll-free hotline to provide information about SARS in 7 languages (English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Thai, Korean, and Spanish). The recorded message explains what SARS is, its symptoms, how it is spread, and traveler recommendations.*

**SARS Hotline: 1-800-989-5255**

**Additional information about SARS is available at: [www.lapublichealth.org/acd/sars.htm](http://www.lapublichealth.org/acd/sars.htm)**



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